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THE RETURN TO THE TRUTH IN MYSTICISM.

IT is our pride and boast that we live in a scientific age. In so far as that means an age free from superstition and devoted to truth, as well as one enriched by the results of applied science, we have cause to rejoice. The scientific spirit is admirable until it becomes negating and exclusive; then it proves our bane and blight. Its affirmations are expansive and releasing, its negations are chilling and binding. If the possession of the scientific spirit means that we must set ourselves either to explore or else deny all that realm of mystery, of intuition, of aspiration, in which religion and art so largely find their home,— thus cutting off sympathy and succession with the racial past,— if it means that we are henceforth to dwell in the light of common day with neither visions nor visitations, in a world wholly tangible, discoverable, matter-of-fact, then perhaps the best thing to do would be to pull the bed-clothes up over our heads and dream again, even though the nightmares, too, returned. It looked for a time as if this disillusioned materialism might become the temper and atmosphere of modern life. But there are indications that the tide has turned and is now flowing back toward that recognition of the realm of the supersensuous, the super-scientific— shall we call it the supernatural?—within which, whether crudely or wisely, the race has found its chiefest hopes and fears, its highest ideals and objects of reverence. Science herself has now pointed the way to a fresh recognition of

the all-embracing reality of the mystical, the unknowable, the spiritual. She has beheld matter take wings and vanish before her eyes. The atom has expanded into an ethereal mansion, in which innumerable ions "rampage and rush about." Herbert Spencer foresaw this collapse of materialism, and his philosophy of the Unknowable is an attempt to recognize the Spiritual and yet to interpret it in terms of the material. We hardly realize as yet how long a step agnosticism took away from materialism, how completely it granted the fundamental premises of idealism. And now comes monism, the mysticism of modern science, and granting even more than agnosticism, again attempts (at least in the person of Haeckel) to explain the greater by the less, mind by matter. Meanwhile, Philosophy watches this invasion of her realm with unconcern, knowing the inevitable outcome.

But although materialism as a philosophy has collapsed, a temper and attitude of mind was created by nineteenth century science which still colors everyday life and more or less dominates the average man. He still remains under the delusion that science has dissipated not only superstition but mystery as well; he thinks the universe completely decipherable, if not already deciphered, and with his fears have also fled his reverences. The result is indifference to the margins of life, concentration upon its sensuous side and its material gains. Hence flow hedonism, immorality, business and political corruption, divorce, luxury, and all that we class as "practical materialism."

Inevitably this spirit has affected current interpretations of Christianity. In the light of the "scientific spirit," history is only an empirical evolution, determined by natural forces and environment. Jesus as a figure in history is wholly explicable, together with the movement—including its illusions and misconceptions—starting from him. As for the experiences of the spirit life, they are phenom-

ena which psychology graciously recognizes and then analyzes and disposes of without reference to super-psychical influence. Let me not seem to imply that these negations are made by science itself; they are unwarranted inferences which the shallow mind draws, be he scientist or layman. Science herself has nothing to say concerning these ultimate problems, often as she has been represented as having solved them.

How far this smug and sensuous philosophy of scientific self-sufficiency, of cosmic comprehensibility, departs from the profounder convictions of humanity, rooted in the philosophy and experience of the ages, hardly need be pointed out. Instead of a sudden emergence into the light of finality, the "scientific age" is likely to prove rather itself a passing phase in the unending quest for truth, a step and only a step onward. Such is the consciousness that is slowly dawning upon thoughtful minds. In other words, everything indicates a return to mysticism. And with it the growths that flourish in the soil of mysticism—religion, poetry, art—will revive. Not that science will be ignored. Rather will it be re-valued and its gains turned to spiritual account. The devout Hindu, concerned solely with finding truth, looks with contempt upon the achievements of English and American engineering. They seem to him child's play, beside the deeper concerns of life, the ultimate problems. That is not the right attitude toward science, but it is more normal than the bridge-builder's indifference to the soul and its problems. Science has quarried rich material for the architecture of the spirit. More than that, science has helped forward, and will help forward, the advance toward ultimate truth. If science has not dissolved mystery, it has at least drawn the boundary line between true mystery and false mystery, and that is a great service. For in coming into right relations with mystery lies our salvation.

In saying that mysticism deserves and will receive fresh recognition and allegiance in the near future, it is essential to discriminate between false mysticism and true mysticism. There is a mysticism which revels in ecstasies, eccentricities, visions, special revelations, individual divine communications; which substitutes fancy for fact, imagination for reality; which disdains the task for the sake of revery; which scorns the human whole in order to exalt the ego. Of this kind of mysticism the world has had too much. It issues in inertia and selfishness. It is neither of the world nor in the world, neither scientific nor sane, neither philosophical nor sensible. And yet there is a mysticism which is sane, rational, unselfish, wide-visioned, which sees farther than telescope can penetrate and goes deeper than plumb can sound, which knows more of nature than science can discover, more of God than scholasticism can compass, more of man than anthropology and psychology can learn. This insight of mysticism—do we think we can dispense with it in this age of the crucible and the scalpel, the statistician and the critic? I use the term mysticism, then, in the broader sense as an attitude of mind, “the attempt,” as Inge defines it, “to realize, in thought and feeling, the immanence of the temporal in the eternal, and of the eternal in the temporal.” (*Christian Mysticism*, p. 5.)

1. A true mysticism, in this sense, is the only key that will unlock the inmost meaning of nature. Science unbars the outer doors and puts the bare mechanism of nature into our hands. But after all, as Sabatier has said, “the world is ruled by symbols, not by science.” And nature is a kingdom of symbols. The poets interpret for us these more secret messages of nature, and in our heart of hearts we care more for them than for all planetary laws and chemical reactions, all physical comforts and electrical appliances. Plato, Francis of Assisi, Words-

worth, Tennyson, Ruskin, Emerson, and all the choir of nature mystics, have disclosed meanings in nature which hold us with a divine fascination. It is in the "thoughts that lie too deep for tears," awakened though they may be by but the meanest flower that blows, that we feel ourselves nearest the eternal realities of nature.

2. A true mysticism is necessary to any large understanding of humanity. He would be a bold man who should profess to know his own selfhood completely. The persistent efforts of an empirical psychology to posit dual or multiple personalities and to exploit and ransack a subliminal consciousness are confessions of the existence of a margin of potencies and possibilities, which leaves personality at best but partially explicable. An old house in Bruges has upon its walls the motto, "There is more in me." There is more in every man, "deep seated in this mystic frame," than he can analyze or fathom. His personality is a meeting-point of self-formations, of racial inheritances and of divine activities, such that none save one above the circle of finite selves can possibly comprehend him wholly. The very conception of *finiteness*, which at once springs up within one when he tries to understand himself, opens an avenue of relationship to an Infinite Self, which must leave him a mystic in spite of himself. And if one cannot comprehend himself, much less can he another self, or that society of finite selves we call humanity.

And since we cannot fully fathom ourselves or humanity, how can we think to fully understand that Man who above all other men fulfilled the wholeness and perfection of personality—Jesus Christ? The men who knew Jesus in the flesh began by thinking that they knew him perfectly. Was he not the son of the carpenter of Nazareth? But bye-and-bye that category failed to exhaust him. Then they called him Teacher, Rabbi; but he outgrew that. Then the great consciousness came to those that knew him best

that he was the Messiah. But even that category proved too limited. So at length after long reflection they said, There is something more than human in him, he is divine, he is the *Word of God*. Neither John nor Paul was a mystic at first; both became mystics as their souls grew in the contemplation of Christ. And as Christ made them mystics, so they made Christianity a mysticism. Such it has remained to this day, finding in Christ values, significances, potencies, which cannot be confined to human terms. Whether Christianity is to retain its mystical element, or whether Christ is to be naturalized, brought within the compass of definite comprehension and limitation, is the great issue now confronting the Church. It is part of the greater issue as between a mystical and a matter-of-fact universe.

3. Once more, a true mysticism alone opens the way to direct and immediate communion with God. It is a daring and high-hearted assumption, from which we in this practical age are inclined to shrink back, that the individual soul can actually commune with God. And yet that has been the claim of Christianity from the very start, never relinquished though often forgotten. Mysticism has held to this faith through all the barren eras of ecclesiasticism, materialism, deism, skepticism,—never failing to maintain the saintly succession of souls very sure of God and of actual, conscious communion with Him. This communion with God, far from depending upon a comprehensive knowledge of Him, deepens in proportion as His absoluteness and incomprehensibility are realized. It was from the mystics that Luther caught the fire with which he kindled all Europe to a new consciousness of God. The German mystics exhibited as noble a harmony of spiritual fervor and practical piety as the world has seen. In England, the Cambridge Platonists showed how perfect a concord mysticism may afford of intellectual strength and spiritual

temper. In our own country it was the mystic (singularly compounded) in Jonathan Edwards that made him great, just as it was the mystic in Henry Ward Beecher and Phillips Brooks that drew the hearts of their hearers and gave to them a fresh sense of God. The history of mysticism shows, it is true, how difficult it is to keep this sense of individual communion with God within the bounds of sobriety and sanity. But with the Christian consciousness as a guide and restraint, the danger of excessive individualism wanes. Christian experience, which we have come to put in advance of all other evidences of Christianity, has within it invariably a mystical element, of differing degree and kind. Each individual Christian has as a rule a certain thrilling, distinctive sense of personal and immediate relation with the Supreme Self, as moving as it is mysterious.

To discredit this type of mysticism as unsound and delusive is to discredit Christianity itself. If "feeling" is prominent in it, it is not an irrational and empty emotion, but that high and holy enkindling which accompanies the most earnest spiritual thinking. As President King has said, "The truly mystical may all be summed up as simply a protest in favor of the whole man—the entire personality." (*Theology and the Social Consciousness*, p. 77.) Even a writer so closely allied with the extravagances of New Thought as H. W. Dresser repudiates all vague, passive, unconcentrated religious revery, and declares, "The foundation of composure is philosophical conviction. It is not faith without reason, but faith rationally scrutinized and developed, that gives this conviction." (*The Power of Silence*, second edition, page 318.) Perhaps no modern scholar has more clearly recognized the meaning and value of true mysticism than Jowett, who, in commenting upon the need of sympathy with mysticism in order to understand Plato, adds: "By mysticism we mean

not the extravagance of an erring fancy, but the concentration of vision in feeling, the enthusiastic love of the good, the true, the one, the sense of the infinity of knowledge and marvel of the human faculties."

Between these two mental attitudes, the thought of our time is vacillating. On the one hand a so-called "scientific," matter-of-fact, exploitable universe; on the other a spiritual, symbolic universe, knowable in part, but packed full of mystery that unfolds only gradually before a developing spiritual insight. Of one of these two conceptions a choice must be made, and the whole tone and character of modern life and conduct, as well as thought, wait upon the issue. Do our worthiest racial ambitions, our highest aims, our truest good, lie in the direction of scientific conquest, physical welfare, material progress, or in the direction of those ethical and spiritual values that belong to a being "moving about in worlds not realized?" The two interests are not antagonistic, but one must be subordinated to the other. The question is one for serious reflection whether a universe shorn of all mystical, spiritual content and meaning would be a true universe, and whether in ceasing altogether to be mystics, men would not also cease to be truly and fully human.

Mysticism is far, indeed, from being a complete and exhaustive philosophy. It fails to do full justice, not only to the rational but to the scientific and to the practical aspects of truth. It is not a return to mysticism itself, as a closed system, that we need, but rather a return to the truth that lies in mysticism—truth that can never be wisely outgrown or permanently thrust aside.

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